

Wonder Wheel – Review

Four people's lives **intertwine** amid the hustle and bustle of the Coney Island amusement park in the 1950s: Ginny (Kate Winslet), an emotionally volatile former actress now working as a **waitress** in a **clam** house; Humpty (Jim Belushi), Ginny's rough-hewn **carousel** operator husband; Mickey (Justin Timberlake), a **handsome** young **lifeguard** who dreams of becoming a **playwright**; and Carolina (Juno Temple), Humpty's long-estranged daughter, who is now hiding out from **gangsters** at her father's apartment.

This is another **earnest**, stylish, deeply observant late work from Allen, with only **subliminal** appearances from the jokey humor that made him a marquee star. There is **foolishness**, but it concerns characters' inner lives, not **slapstick**.

A **cautionary** tale of romantic delusion, the story is set beside Coney Island's seedy, colorful boardwalk shortly after World War II, an era and social environment Allen knows intimately. It's a period kitchen-sink drama in the style of Arthur Miller, with **crushed** illusions, infidelity, **betrayal**, guilt and personal **conscience** at the forefront, alongside Allen's recurring focus, a woman with marital problems.

There's a theatrical atmosphere to Wonder Wheel, a formally polished work of **moody** 1950s nostalgia from the endlessly prolific Allen. In its claustrophobic set design, shimmering kaleidoscopic lighting, lengthy uninterrupted takes and dramatic dialogue, it knits the principal strands of a **stage** piece into film form. It's modest but successful — a lovely **tribute** to the plays that Allen clearly adores, with production design that gives every scene the patina of a 1950s Coney Island postcard.

The luminous camera work by superstar cinematographer Vittorio Storaro could be framed and hung as art. While Wonder Wheel isn't in the top rank of the 50-plus features that Allen has directed since 1966, it's far more **ambitious** and well-crafted than most other American films from the past year.

